



“Rum-Running” Controversies in Jupiter’s “Town Hall”

Kevin Hemstock’s Jupiter Courier article which is on the Jupiter History website, [“Jupiter was the Hub for Illegal Booze.”](#) is an excellent account of Jupiter during the “Roaring 20’s.”

During the Florida land boom, there were big plans for Jupiter’s growth. But the land boom was coming to an end in the mid-1920’s and property taxes became a burden for Jupiter’s citizens. So much of Jupiter’s revenue came from fines and forfeitures.

Hemstock’s article quotes former Mayor Carlin White, who lived in Jupiter at the time, as saying Prohibition was not popular in Jupiter, and running liquor was a way for folks to try and make a little money in tough times. Jupiter was a hotspot for rum-running because of the Jupiter Inlet, its major road the Dixie Highway, and its proximity to the Bahamas.

Mr. White recounted in the article that the liquor from the Bahamas was packed in burlap bags, or a “straw sack kind of thing.” Most people didn’t know about the rum-running or didn’t care, and there were also local stills in the area.

In her 1975 book “Shipwrecks in the Vicinity of Jupiter Inlet,” well-known local historian Bessie Wilson DuBois

told of a winter day in 1925 when local surf fisherman were casting for heavy burlap sacks, and opening them to find “German beer, imported wine, and liquors of all kinds intended for the Palm Beach holiday trade.” She said people rushed to put the liquor in their trunks, or just sat on the beach and drank. She said it was “a gala day.”

How did all this affect Jupiter’s government? There were several Town Hall issues related to rum-running! Money came into the Town’s coffers from fines and forfeitures, as mentioned earlier. The minutes of July 19, 1927 showed the following resolution was unanimously adopted: “Be it resolved by the Commission of the Town of Jupiter, Palm Beach County, Florida, that the Town has no further use for the sea skiff acquired by condiscation *[sic]* for illegally transporting intoxicating liquors, now in its possession *[sic]* and that the same be sold, if the same can be legally done, pursuant to the provisions of the Ordinances of this Town, Numbered 37.” (This resolution no longer exists in the Town’s official records.) This shows how the Town got some money to help pay the bills!

But as mentioned in the Hemstock article, keeping seized liquor was also one way for individual citizens to make money. This conflict of interest spelled trouble!

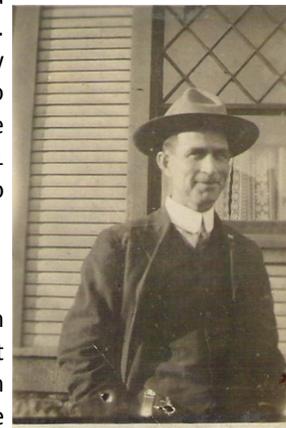
On July 30, 1927 there was a long and heated special meeting of the Town Commission. The four pages of minutes explain the purpose of the meeting was to “consider the suspension and discharge of the police officers of the Town or any of them” also “to consider any and all matters with respect to the police and police department of the Town and the policing of the Town...”

Vice-Mayor Charles L. Bennett wanted to suspend police officer Raymond B. Force for reckless driving. Mr. Force defended himself by saying he had gone over the speed limit many times, even when riding with the Chief of Police, Commissioner William H. Miranda, and that he wasn't the only one who broke the law. *He said “one of the Commissioners when liquor was broken up put whiskey in his car and took it home with him.”* Vice-Mayor Bennett said he knew Mr. Force was referring to **him**, because Commissioner Miranda had told Officer Force that Mr. Bennett had taken two bottles of liquor, but that “he was willing to have the Commission make such investigation of the charge against him as it was fit and that he was willing to submit affidavits that the charge against him was untrue.” Even with the accusations going back and forth, Officer Force was discharged from his position at this special meeting.

The Commission discussed the police force in general at this meeting. Vice-Mayor Bennett suggested a new police chief since Commissioner Miranda was ill. Some commissioners did not want to appoint someone “outside the Board of Commissioners,” reportedly due to cost. Some Commissioners wanted to curtail the daytime police force because it was not needed. Another did not, stating “Officer Force had arrested a man for speeding through the Town and upon arresting him found 6 bottles of gin in the car; that he was convicted and paid a fine of \$500.00; that another time, also during the daytime, a truck load of liquor was caught and a large fine paid/that former police officer Shepper was arrested during the day for illegally having *[sic]* liquor in large quantities; that all of these offences took place in the daytime; that the police had more than paid their salaried *[sic]* in arresting violators of the law and ordinances.”

There clearly was a conflict between catching rum-runners and collecting fines for the Town's bank accounts and turning a blind eye to folks carrying liquor. Ultimately at this meeting they decided to have Commissioner Rex C. Albertson serve as a non-paid police officer during the daytime.

On August 2 of 1927 liquor came up again at the Town Commission meeting! James E. Williams addressed the Commission about an affidavit from a Mr. Ivan Moree who was the defendant charged with rum-running. Mr. Moree swore that he was present with Wm. H. Miranda and Raymond Force when a liquor boat was unloaded, that the boat had 181 sacks of liquor, with 5 being beer, and one sack of liquor had been given to the tow boat. Mr. Williams said regardless of this affidavit, the docket of the Mayor's Court had shown only 50 sacks. Mr. Williams said he did not know who brought the liquor into the country, but the invoice at West End showed 181 sacks. There was no explanation of this discrepancy.



William H. Miranda

This meeting continued with a discussion of the fact that the Town's books were in such a terrible state that the Town requested the State Comptroller have an audit done. This audit showed how rum-running affected the Town. The auditors reported they had been unable to account for the disposition of 2 Studebakers, a motor boat, a Packard, a Ford, and 5 pistols that were confiscated property. And they once again mentioned the 181 sacks of liquor which somehow turned into 50 sacks on the dockets of the Mayor's court. They also mentioned an affidavit from Mr. James E. Williams that he had confiscated 3 other guns and given them to W. H. Miranda.

The Mayor when the rum-running case with the “sack discrepancy” came before the Mayor's court was William H. Reeves. He had *already* resigned as Mayor on July 26, 1927 stating **“owing to certain irregularities in the policing to the Town which he was powerless to correct and for which he was unwilling to take the responsibility, made such a course seem to him necessary.”**

An April 28, 1927 photograph of the capture of two boats of liquor from the Bahamas identifies the people in the photo as the above-mentioned Mayor Reeves, Chief of Police William H. Miranda, Police Officer Raymond Force, Deputy A. B. Wilson, and Police Officer Dale Cook. The photo says the two boats contained

over 500 sacks, which were all destroyed by police. *By the end of 1927 all five of these people had resigned or been terminated.* It was truly a wild time in Jupiter!

After Police officer Dale Cook was terminated, Mr. James E. Williams was hired on November 29, 1927. Unfortunately, rum-running still continued, and he soon had his turn on the "hot seat." On March 13, 1928, Mayor Charles L. Bennett, a fern grower from New York who moved to Jupiter circa 1923, had a three page letter inserted in the Town Commission meeting minutes.

This letter outlined a liquor seizure made near Ruby Heights on January 22, 1928. He delayed reporting the matter due to a federal investigation, but he wanted to outline "gross violations and neglect of duties not only by the police officer but also by certain Commissioners."

Mayor Bennett said there were numerous affidavits that Commissioner R. C. Albertson and James Williams seized liquor and that Albertson's employees put some of the bottles in their shirts until Mr. Albertson said they had enough. The letter continued that Mr. Albertson had these employees set aside the best liquor, destroy other liquor, hide 8 sacks for evidence and then load 40 sacks in his Essex Sedan. Then Albertson and Williams drove off. From this liquor seizure, only 5 bottles of gin were turned in to the Town by Albertson and Williams.

Mayor Bennett's letter continued on to mention another seizure up the Loxahatchee River north of Colonel Branch's where 53 liquor sacks were turned in to the Town although the federal affidavits showed there were 73 sacks. Mayor Bennett in his letter indicated that the Commissioner of Public Welfare J. F. Turner (also the head of the police department) took a sack of champagne.

Mayor Bennett recommended the discharge of James E. Williams, noting he was a deputy sheriff as well as a Town policeman, that R. C. Albertson no longer be the Vice-Mayor, and that J. F. Turner no longer be Commissioner of Public Welfare.

The Town Commission minutes go on to say "A long heated discussion followed which was not recorded." That is unfortunate; as it would be very interesting to know what was said!

The meeting continued with Mr. Turner introducing a letter from Mr. Bennett which discussed who had distributed certain "unsigned political propaganda." In the letter, Mr. Bennett accused Mr. Turner of thinking he had sent the literature, but said it had been sent by Mr. Van Vleck, who was the Town Clerk.

"Hide 8 sacks for evidence and then load 40 sacks in his Essex sedan.

After all these cross accusations, the Town Commission adopted an emergency ordinance and appointed new heads of all the departments. Who was elected the new Commissioner of Public Welfare (also police chief?) The above-accused R. C. Albertson! He also retained the Vice-Mayor position.

At the next Commission meeting affidavits were read including one from J. F. Turner refuting the Mayor's letter, and charging him with "knowledge of liquor violations, liquor traffic through the Inlet and the theft of a boat, quoting from the Mayor's report to prove this knowledge, and charging the Mayor with gross neglect of duty in not punishing the offenders."

The minutes continue: "a heated discussion followed in which charges and counter charges were made but not here recorded." (Once again.) Mayor Bennett made some statements in defense of his letter.

However, after all this, the minutes state "the matter then rested." Nothing came of these matters legally. As outlined earlier, taking seized liquor and running illegal liquor was just not that serious of an issue in those days. Indeed, it was some of the people who were transporting the illegal liquor who made the affidavits accusing others of making off with it after it was seized!

As further evidence, J. F. Turner ran for Mayor against Charles L. Bennett and won the April 1928 election 68 to 59 votes. So much of the dispute on liquor seizures

could have been politically motivated .

Contention continued in Town Hall. On November 19, 1928, Mayor J. F. Turner, Police Officer James E. Williams, and R. C. Albertson as police commissioner all resigned. Their resignations were laid on the table and the meeting adjourned. Charles L. Bennett resigned as a Commissioner on December 31, 1928. Mr. Bennett ran for the Commission again in 1929, but lost. James E. Williams was reappointed police officer on April 9, 1929.

But liquor was not a part of the disputes on the Town Commission after the great debate of March 1928. First there was the hurricane of September 1928, and by June of 1929 a new issue was brewing. Five of the Town Commissioners had withdrawn their property from Jupiter and become part of the new Plumasus City, and fourteen citizens (including Charles L. Bennett) had demanded that they resign from the Jupiter Town Commission. Of these five Commissioners (Albertson, Bassett, Bogardus, Stephens, and Turner) four were Commissioners of Plumasus City! The Town Attorney ruled they could remain as Commissioners even though they weren't part of the Town.

So rum-running disputes disappeared from the annals of Town Hall, but they were certainly an interesting part of the history of Jupiter in the 1920's.



Picture from A. B. Wilson is Courtesy of Brad Wolf

4/28/27
 I helped to capture these Two boats
 of Liquor from Nassau Island, Little
 boat 233 sks Whiskey big boat 307 sks -
 value \$45000 all destroyed by officers .
 5 men, Two boats Fined \$2500
 #1 Mayor W. H. Reeves,
 #2 Chief Police William Miranda,
 #3 Police Raymond Force
 #4 Deputy, A. B. Wilson
 #5 Police Dale Cook.

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